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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 3271
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001760

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA
ALSO FOR IO A/S HOOK, PDAS WARLICK
P FOR DRUSSELL AND RRANGASWAMY
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/GERMAIN/SCHEDLBAUER
NSC FOR ABRAMS/RAMCHAND/YERGER/MCDERMOTT

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SUBJECT: LEBANON: MARCH 14 OFFICIALS TELL CODEL ACKERMAN
THEY MUST WIN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

SUMMARY

11. (C) In a December 13 meeting, March 14 members expressed to Codel Ackerman their determination to win the spring 2009 parliamentary elections, and said the U.S. should support Lebanon rather than any single party. Rather than electoral politics, however, the bulk of the meeting was taken up with a discussion of approaches to disarming Hizballah, through solving Sheba'a Farms, strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces, and securing Lebanon's borders with Israel and Syria. The codel also underscored continuing U.S. commitment to the Special Tribunal. End summary.

12. (C) Codel Ackerman, accompanied by Ambassador and EmbOffs, met with March 14 members at the March 14 coalition's secretariat headquarters on December 13. March 14 members present were head of National Liberal Party Dory Chamoun, MP Samir Franjeh, Kataeb member Michel Meccattaf, Lebanese Forces member Eddy Abillama, Future Movement member Amar Khoury, and Democratic Renewal Movement member Tony Haddad. Codel members were Representative Gary Ackerman, D-NY, chairman of the subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, and subcommittee members Representative Jeff Flake, R-AZ; Representative Joe Wilson, R-SC; Representative Brian Higgins, D-NY; and Representative Ron Klein, D-FL; as well as subcommittee staffers David Adams, Greg McCarthy, and Howard Diamond.

MUST WIN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

13. (C) Noting that March 14 is a movement founded on shared principles of democracy and multi-confessionalism, Tony Haddad underlined that if the alliance is unsuccessful in the 2009 election, it will mean a setback for all of Lebanon, not only March 14. Amar Khoury added that he hopes the U.S. will continue to support democracy and the Lebanese government, instead of a specific party. Ackerman responded that he understood their message, saying, "We support March 14, and peace on March 15, and March 16, and so forth."

"NO SINGLE SOLUTION TO
DISARMING HIZBALLAH"

¶4. (C) Dory Chamoun stressed his belief that that Israeli withdrawal from Sheba'a Farms would eliminate Hizballah's justification for possessing arms. Haddad emphasized that Hizballah hides behind Sheba'a, which is why it is symbolically important to resolve. Michel Meccattaf added that strengthening the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and securing all of Lebanon's borders were important components to disarming Hizballah.

SPLITTING SYRIA FROM IRAN

¶5. (C) Meccattaf also expressed concern that France was warming up to Syria and inquired about the U.S. position on Syria. Ackerman responded that the U.S. would like to see more of a "positive, rather than dominating" role played by Syria in its relations with Lebanon. Representative Klein added that the U.S. hopes Syria will move away from Iran, but that Syria's willingness to do that is unknown. Haddad added that it was equally important to split Hizballah from Iran, "by facts, not just words."

SPECIAL TRIBUNAL, REGIONAL
PEACE REMAIN TOP PRIORITIES

¶6. (C) "Punishment for political crimes is absolutely necessary," Haddad stated, expressing his hope for progress on the Special Tribunal. Affirming that justice must be realized, Ackerman underscored that the Special Tribunal will

BEIRUT 00001760 002 OF 002

remain important to the next U.S. administration, and that nothing would be done at the expense of the Tribunal.

¶7. (C) For his part, Franjeh was adamant that the peace process must be broader than an Israeli-Palestinian track, and should include the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

SISON